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Surah Al-Hajj

The Pilgrimage · Madani · 78 ayat — reflections on
surah 22 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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الحج — Al-Hajj, "The Pilgrimage". Surah 22 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 78 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/22/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Centered on Hajj and the call Ibrahim raised to it, the surah joins the reality of Resurrection with true devotion, permits the oppressed to fight back, and summons humanity to sincere worship and sacrifice for God alone.

Al-Hajj opens with the convulsion of the Hour so severe that nursing mothers forget their infants (22:1-2), then grounds the certainty of resurrection in the stages of the human embryo and the reviving of dead earth by rain (22:5). It is unusual in blending Makkan awe with Madani legislation: it grants the persecuted believers permission to fight after long restraint (22:39), lays out the rites of pilgrimage and sacrifice, and insists that what reaches God is not the flesh or blood but the God-consciousness of the giver (22:37). The surah calls to Abraham's proclamation of the Hajj (22:27) and ends urging the community to strive genuinely for God and to hold to 'the faith of your father Ibrahim' (22:78). Ibn Kathir highlights how it repeatedly turns the eye from spectacle to the state of the heart.

OCCASIONS OF REVELATION

Why it was revealed

These are the occasions (asbāb al-nuzūl) that the authentic collections narrate for verses of this surah. An occasion explains a verse; it does not limit its meaning.

Qur'an 22:19

The verse "These two opponents dispute with each other about their Lord" was revealed about the six men who faced each other in single combat at Badr: 'Ali, Hamza and 'Ubaida ibn al-Harith against Shaiba, 'Utba and al-Walid ibn 'Utba.

"was revealed concerning six men from Quraish"

Abu Dharr · Sahih al-Bukhari 3966

TWO

Its themes

- Terror of the Hour
- Resurrection argued from creation
- Permission for defensive struggle
- Rites and inner meaning of Hajj
- Sincerity over ritual form

THREE

Key verses

O mankind! if ye have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that ye may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much), and (further), thou seest the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs).

Qur'an 22:5

The passage through drop, clot, and formed flesh, and the barren earth stirred to life by rain, is offered as tangible proof that the One who began life can restore it.

It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for His Guidance to you and proclaim the good news to all who do right.

Qur'an 22:37

'Their flesh and blood do not reach God, but your God-consciousness reaches Him' — al-Sa'di reads this as the axis of all worship: the outward act is a shell for the taqwa within.

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged;- and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid;-

Qur'an 22:39

The first verse permitting the wronged to fight; al-Tabari records it as descending after years in which the believers were told only to endure, framing struggle as a response to oppression, not aggression.

Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts.

Qur'an 22:46

'It is not the eyes that go blind, but the hearts within the breasts' — Ibn Kathir cites this as the surah's diagnosis of denial: a defect of the heart, not of information.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Sūrat al-Ḥajj is unusual and much discussed by the scholars, for it seems to straddle the two halves of the Prophet's mission. The weight of the tradition treats it as Madanī, and it contains the first verse permitting the believers to fight back against those who wronged them (22:39). Yet parts of it carry the terror and majesty of Makkan preaching about the Hour, and some early authorities called it a surah with both Makkan and Madanī passages. This dual texture is part of its character: it holds together the trembling awe of the Resurrection and the practical, communal commands of an established community.

It takes its name from the pilgrimage, and its central passages proclaim the Ḥajj that Ibrāhīm was commanded to announce to mankind (22:27), describe its rites, and explain the meaning of the sacrificial animals. But the surah is far wider than ritual law. It ranges over the shaking of the Last Hour, the stages of human creation, the argument for resurrection from the reviving of dead earth, the sanctity of God's symbols, the permission to fight in defence of houses of worship, and a closing call to strive in God's cause.

The scholars noted that al-Ḥajj is distinctive in containing two places of prostration (a point on which the Shāfiʿī school and others differ from some Kūfans), which some read as a mark of its concentrated devotional intensity. Its mood is grand and sweeping — it opens by commanding all humanity to fear their

Lord and pictures the Hour so violent that a nursing mother forgets her infant (22:2), yet it also speaks with intimate tenderness of the pilgrim, the sacrifice, and the God who defends those who believe.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens with a command to all mankind and a vision of the Hour's convulsion — the earthquake, the nursing mothers distracted from their babies, people appearing drunk though they are not, so severe is God's punishment (22:1–2). It rebukes those who dispute about God without knowledge, following every rebellious devil (22:3–4), and then addresses the deniers of resurrection with a double proof: the stages of the human being's own creation from dust, then a drop, then a clinging clot, and the greening of dead earth when rain falls upon it (22:5–7). If God can do that, raising the dead is no difficulty. It contrasts the one who worships God "on an edge" — clinging to faith only while things go well and turning away at the first trial (22:11) — with the firm believer.

The surah then declares that God will judge between the religions on the Day of Resurrection and that everything in the heavens and earth prostrates to Him (22:17–18). It paints a stark diptych of the two parties: the people of the Fire, for whom garments of fire are cut and boiling water is poured, and the people of the Garden, adorned with bracelets and silk, guided to the good word and the praised path (22:19–24). It moves to the Sacred House, condemning those who bar people from it, and recounts how God settled Ibrāhīm at its site and commanded him to proclaim the pilgrimage to all mankind, who

would come from every distant path (22:25–29). It details the rites and the sacrificial offerings, teaching the great principle that "their meat will not reach God, nor their blood, but what reaches Him is your piety" (22:37), and that the sanctified animals and the symbols of God are to be honoured (22:30–37).

At the surah's turning point comes the historic permission to fight: God defends those who believe, and permission is granted to those wronged and driven from their homes for no cause but saying "Our Lord is God" (22:38–39). It adds the profound reason — that were it not for God's checking of some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which God's name is much mentioned, would have been destroyed (22:40). It promises help to those who, if established in the land, would establish prayer, give zakāt, enjoin good, and forbid evil (22:41). The surah then consoles the Prophet ﷺ by listing the nations that denied their messengers before (22:42–44), reflects on ruined towns and the blindness not of eyes but of hearts (22:46), and reminds that a day with God may equal a thousand years of our reckoning (22:47). It closes with a rising sequence: the assurance that God abrogates what Satan casts (22:52), the sovereignty of God over the Day of Judgement, and a final, stirring address to the believers — bow, prostrate, worship your Lord, do good, and strive for God with the striving due to Him, following the way of your father Ibrāhīm, who named you Muslims (22:77–78).

The major themes, in depth

A first theme is the certainty of resurrection, argued from creation and from the living earth. The surah meets the doubter not with mere assertion but with two everyday miracles he cannot deny. First, his own body: he was made from dust, then a drop, then a clot, then formed and unformed, brought as an infant, grown to maturity, some dying young and some living to a feeble old age when they forget all they knew (22:5). Second, the dead land: barren, still, then quickened, stirring, and swelling with every lovely kind of growth when the rain descends. The God who authored both can surely raise the dead, "and that the Hour is coming, no doubt about it, and that God will resurrect those in the graves" (22:7). Al-Sa'dī notes how the surah grounds an unseen truth in the most familiar seen realities, so the proof is always at hand.

A second theme is the meaning of worship and sacrifice — that God wants the heart, not the ritual as an empty form. The Hajj passages describe real, embodied acts: the animals brought for sacrifice, the standing, the circling of the Ancient House. Yet the surah pierces to their purpose with one of its most important lines: "Their meat will not reach God, nor their blood, but what reaches Him is the piety from you" (22:37). The blood spilled and flesh distributed are outward; what ascends to God is taqwā — the reverence, gratitude, and obedience that animate the act. This reframes all of ritual: the rites are a school for the heart, and "whoever honours the symbols of God — that is from the piety of hearts" (22:32). The surah thus guards worship against both those who would abandon it and those who would reduce it to mechanics.

A third theme is legitimate struggle in defence of faith and freedom of worship. This surah contains the first permission to fight, and the scholars stress how carefully it is framed: it is granted to those who were wronged and "expelled from their homes without right, only because they said, 'Our Lord is God'" (22:39–40). The stated rationale is not conquest but protection: without God's restraint of aggressors through others, "monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is much mentioned" would be torn down (22:40). Remarkably, the verse defends the houses of worship of other faiths as well, teaching that the point of sanctioned struggle is to preserve the space in which God can be worshipped at all. And the surah immediately profiles the kind of people worthy of God's help: those who, given power, would establish prayer, pay zakāt, and command good and forbid evil (22:41) — a charter that ties the sword to justice and reform, never to mere self-interest.

A fourth theme is the summons to a religion that is at once ancient and demanding, the millat Ibrāhīm. The surah roots the pilgrimage in Ibrāhīm's founding call (22:26–27) and ends by naming him the father of the believers, the one from whom the name "Muslims" descends (22:78). It calls its listeners to strenuous devotion — "strive for God with the striving due to Him" — while reassuring them that He "has not placed upon you in the religion any hardship" (22:78). The balance is deliberate: the faith is serious enough to demand one's utmost effort, yet merciful enough to remain within human capacity. The believers are told they are chosen, that the Messenger is a witness over

them and they witnesses over mankind, and so they must hold fast to God, "He is your protector — an excellent protector and an excellent helper" (22:78).

Points of reflection

Al-Hajj presses the reader to examine the sincerity of their faith with its portrait of the one who worships "on an edge" (22:11) — content while blessed, apostatising at the first affliction. It is a searching self-test: is my devotion tied to my comfort, so that it wavers when God tests me with loss? The surah invites a faith that is anchored deeper than circumstance, that holds firm precisely when the trial comes.

It transforms how one approaches acts of worship. If neither the meat nor the blood of the sacrifice reaches God, only one's taqwā (22:37), then the same is true of every prayer, fast, and charity: their value lies in the heart behind them. The surah asks the worshipper to bring presence and reverence, not to go through motions, and to see the outward rite as the vessel for an inward offering.

And it dignifies the defence of the vulnerable and of sacred space as part of God's purpose in the world. That God preserves the houses of worship — including those of other communities — by restraining aggressors (22:40) reminds the believer that faith is not served by passivity before oppression, yet the only sanctioned struggle is one bound to justice, prayer, and the good of society (22:41). The surah's closing word is its lasting charge: to bow, prostrate, do good, and strive in God's cause with everything one has, holding fast to the God who is the best of protectors.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Resurrection is not far-fetched for anyone who watches seeds and embryos.
2. God weighs the sincerity behind an act, never the mere quantity of ritual.
3. Permission to resist oppression came only after patient endurance was exhausted.
4. True blindness is of the heart; guard against a heart that cannot see truth it is shown.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.